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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9650

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 8621

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0694

RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0291

RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0377

RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2939

RHHJJPI/PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI

RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001032

NOFORN

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB, SCA/FO, AND EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/11/2019

TAGS: PREL PINR PINS MARR ASEC PGOV BG BM

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER CONSIDERS ENGAGEMENT WITH RANGOON
AS BANGLADESH-BURMA TENSIONS SUBSIDE

REF: DHAKA 986

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Classified By: Acting DCM Jon F. Danilowicz. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S/NF) Bangladesh's worries about possible Burmese aggression appear to have subsided, and the Prime Minister is now considering possible engagement with Rangoon. As tensions flared in October, Bangladesh's civilian leadership asserted control over Burma policy, with the Foreign Minister leading the way. For its part, Bangladesh's military leadership has also backed down. USG reassurances regarding Burmese intentions played a role in moderating Bangladesh's behavior. The GOB deserves high marks for its handling of the government's first major foreign policy crisis.

Burma as an Area of Opportunism and Opportunity

¶2. (C) Referring to their previous discussions on the Burma-Bangladesh border situation, on November 5 the Ambassador advised the PM that the U.S. did not see any indications that Burma was preparing for aggressive action against Bangladesh, despite alarmist reports in the Bangladeshi media. The Prime Minister quickly responded, "I totally agree with you. But somehow from some quarter they are trying to create a problem on this issue." (Note: The PM presumably meant either the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party or the military or both). Despite her lack of concern, she indicated that that there would not be any additional security withdrawal from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area along the Burmese border. She advised the Ambassador that she had cautioned the GOB army chief and others that there should not be any provocations against Burma.

¶3. (C) The Prime Minister noted that Foreign Minister Dipu Moni had spoken with the Burmese in an effort to improve relations. The PM wondered aloud whether she might be able to accept a recent invitation from the Burmese government to visit. The PM stressed she was a supporter of Aung San Suu Kyi. Hasina noted with approval the recent visit of EAP Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell to Burma and said his

meeting with ASSK gave hope that the PM herself might travel to Burma and also meet with ASSK. She expressed hope for rapprochement given what she called the "psychological pressures on Burma."

Military Also Backs Down

14. (S//NF) During the first week of November, USARPAC Commander LTG Mixon, Seventh Fleet Commander VADM Bird, and PACOM J-5 MG Alles separately visited Dhaka and met with senior Bangladeshi military officers. Each flag officer asked his Bangladeshi counterpart to describe his "biggest security concerns." The Army and Navy chiefs, as well as the Principal Staff Officer all left Burma essentially off the list. Only when discussing future procurements, the Navy Chief noted his concern that Burma could obtain or build ships and aircraft much faster than Bangladesh because of the GOB's procurement bureaucracy. Overall, these conversations were very different from the "it is not if, but when the attack comes" conversations we have had with the Bangladesh military in recent months. In one telling conversation, the Director General of Bangladesh's border guards specifically said that Burmese counterparts on the other side of the line now answer their phone calls, and that tensions have reduced

Comment

15. (S//NF) As Bangladesh's military and civilian leadership began to express concern about possible Burmese aggression and as the media jumped on this story, we sought to inject a note of caution. In consultation with the Dept, we advised the GOB that we saw no signs of Burmese aggression. This

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message was reinforced during PSO MG Wadud's recent visit to PACOM. We assess that these reassurances helped to allay Bangladesh's concerns. The PM and FM also deserve credit for opening lines of communication to Burmese counterparts. This was a successful test for Bangladesh's emerging civil-military relationship. We hope to expand further on this theme in coming days as we sponsor a civil-military relations dialogue with the help of the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies. This episode has underscored the importance of intelligence analysis and threat identification as part of national security decision making.

MORIARTY